Charles C. Jones, Jr., and the Mystery of Lee's Lost Dispatches

BY WILLIAM HARRIS BRAGG

A slim package arrived at the *Scribner's Monthly* editorial offices in New York City during the first week of November 1875. Nothing marked it as unusual from other submissions—except perhaps the exquisite penmanship displayed on the envelope.[1] The contents were another matter. Embedded within an explanatory narrative was the transcript of a hitherto unpublished and unknown letter from General Robert E. Lee to Confederate president Jefferson Davis. Reading with a mixture of surprise and interest, the editors saw that the letter—dated August 8, 1863—contained an offer by Lee, written after his Gettysburg defeat, to resign command of the Army of Northern Virginia.[2] If *Scribner's* was not interested in publishing the piece, wrote the sender, one Charles C. Jones, Jr., "I beg you to treat the matter as confidential, and to return me the enclosed at your earliest leisure."[3]

Needing assurance that the missive was genuine, the editors entered into a month-long correspondence with Jones. Who was he, they inquired, and what proof had he that the letter was authentic? "I am not accustomed to giving references,"

[1]Charles C. Jones, Jr., to Editor, *Scribner's Monthly*, November 1, 1875, Letterbook #L-2037, Charles C. Jones, Jr., Papers, Manuscript Department, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C. (letterbooks hereinafter cited as LB, location as Duke). Jones's penmanship was described as "faultless . . . his bold flowing hand . . . not only legible but very attractive," a description borne out by surviving letters and manuscripts. Charles Edgeworth Jones, "Col. Charles C. Jones, Jr., LL.D, Late of Augusta, Ga.," *Gulf States Historical Magazine* 1 (March 1903): 309.

[2]*Letter of General Robert E. Lee, tendering to the President of the Confederate States his resignation of the Command of the Army of Northern Virginia: with explanatory notes by Charles C. Jones, Jr.*, Special Collections, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Ga. (location hereinafter cited as UGA). This is a bound manuscript of what *Scribner's* ultimately published as "A Piece of Secret History."

[3]Jones to *Scribner's*, November 1, 1875, LB #L-2037, Duke.

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Jones responded; nonetheless, he supplied the name of his law partner, the prominent attorney John Elliott Ward, and revealed himself as the author of the well-received *Antiquities of the Southern Indians*, published two years earlier by Appleton's. Regarding the provenance of the letter he had sent *Scribner's*, Jones offered no clue. But its authenticity, he asserted, was unassailable. He had personally made his copy from the original. Apparently stung by the magazine's suspicious approach, Jones added that he would have no trouble placing the article elsewhere: he was not an amateur in publishing matters.[4] Nor was he an amateur in other matters. Scion of a family of coastal Georgia grandees, mayor of Savannah—his state's largest city—at the age of twenty-nine, and later lieutenant-colonel in the Confederate artillery, Jones had already published several books and pamphlets of historical and antiquarian interest. A prewar graduate of Princeton and Harvard, he had come north in 1867 to restore his war-wrecked fortune. Such time as could be spared from his law practice, however, he devoted to research and writing.[5]

In late November, Jones and the editors came to terms; he accepted fifty dollars for his manuscript. Consequently, the monthly's February 1876 issue featured an article intriguingly titled "A Piece of Secret History." Given the reading public's continuing fascination with both Lee and the climactic battle at Gettysburg, there was great interest in the resignation letter, which was quickly reprinted in newspapers nationwide.[6]

[4]*Ibid.*, November 4, 20, 1875; Irving L. Thompson, "Ward, John Elliott," *Dictionary of American Biography* (hereinafter cited as *DAB*), 19: 426-27; John Donald Wade, "Jones, Charles Colcock," *DAB*, 10: 165. Jones is sometimes confused with his father, the Reverend Charles Colcock Jones, a nationally known Presbyterian divine of the antebellum period.

[5]Robert Manson Myers, ed., *The Children of Pride: A True Story of Georgia and the Civil War* (New Haven, 1972), 1568.

[6]Jones to *Scribner's*, November 27, 1875, LB #L-2037, Duke; Charles C. Jones, Jr., "A Piece of Secret History," *Scribner's Magazine* 11 (February 1876): 519-22; Jones to *Scribner's*, January 24, 1876, LB #L-2037, Duke; *New York Times*, January 23, 1876;

Charles C. Jones, Jr., ca. 1860, as First Lieutenant, Chatham Artillery. He would later serve as a lieutenant colonel in the Confederate artillery. *Photograph courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, University of Georgia Libraries.*

Soon General D. H. Maury of the Southern Historical Society sent a copy of the letter to its original recipient, ex-President Davis, then in New Orleans. Maury requested authentication of the Lee letter, as well as a copy of Davis's response. Weighted with both personal and financial cares and responsibilities, Davis had scant interest in the matter. Though briefly wondering how the letter had come into other hands, he soon sent Maury's inquiry to Major William T. Walthall for response.[7] Walthall was editor of the Mobile, Alabama *Cycle*, and a former Confederate conscription officer who was gathering information for Davis's memoirs. In the presidential letterbooks in his keeping, he found Davis's admirable response to the resignation letter and published both in his newspaper; this combination was then widely reprinted. And there, for a time, the matter rested.[8]

But by early 1877, Davis had finally settled for good at Beauvoir, near the murmuring surf of Mississippi's Gulf shore. At last he was ready to write his long-postponed account of the

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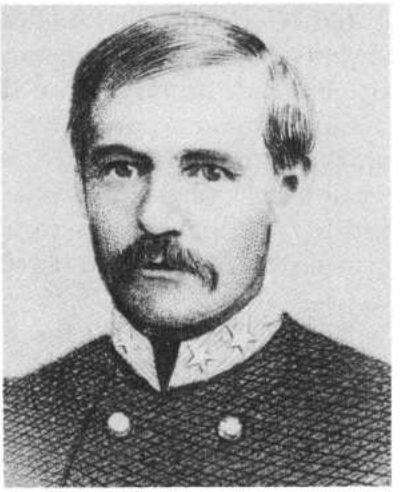
Richmond Whig, January 19, 1876. The article concluded with an editorial note stating that the piece was being published "in the language of sectional friendliness" in which it had reached the magazine, and that it showed "how truly and earnestly one side regards as pure patriot him whom the other side looks upon with condemnation." Jones, "Secret History," 521, 522. In *The Myth of the Lost Cause, 1865-1900* (Hamden, Conn., 1973), Rollin G. Osterweis marks the publication of Jones's article as one of *Scribner's* early efforts to help restore the South to the Union, "the leading object of the . . . centennial." While Osterweis labels the article "typical of the literature later to be associated with the legend of the Lost Cause," it also portrays Lee as "Knight of the Confederacy," a chivalric image normally associated with writings on Lee in the late 1890s. Osterweis, *Lost Cause*, 36, 62; Thomas L. Connelly, *The Marble Man: Robert E. Lee and His Image in American Society* (New York, 1977), 100-102.

[7]D. H. Maury to Jefferson Davis, January 19, 1876, and Davis's endorsement, January 25, 1876, in Dunbar Rowland, ed., *Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist*, 10 vols. (Jackson, Miss., 1923), 7: 487 (hereinafter cited as Rowland); Jefferson Davis to Burton Harrison, May 19, 1877, Burton N. Harrison Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereinafter cited as Harrison Papers).

[8]Chester Delaney Walthall, "The Walthall Family" (typescript in private possession), 103; Albert Burton Moore, *Conscription and Conflict in the Confederacy* (New York, 1963), 193 n. 5; Collection Description, William T. Walthall Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Miss.; Mobile *Cycle*, January 29, 1876; "General Lee's Letter Offering To Resign—Mr. Davis's Reply," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 2 (July 1876): 53 (hereinafter cited as *SHSP*). Blamed by many for the Gettysburg defeat, General James Longstreet later used the resignation letter to suggest that Lee himself, who mentioned his poor health, was not up to form during the Pennsylvania campaign. Connelly, *Marble Man*, 87-90; James Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox* (Philadelphia, 1896), 432.



As Jefferson Davis's private secretary during the Civil War and guardian to his papers at the war's end, Burton Harrison was a key figure in the mystery of Lee's lost dispatches. This engraving, in which Harrison appears as a Confederate colonel, was published in Davis's *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*; it was based upon an 1866 photograph.

Confederacy's rise and fall.[9] As the search for source material widened, however, it became obvious that the puzzling appearance of the resignation letter was related to a mysterious situation of long standing: the continued inaccessibility of a rich cache of manuscripts—a collection that should have been at Davis's command.

These papers were in the keeping of Davis's wartime private secretary, Burton N. Harrison, who was then practicing law in New York City. Harrison was a curious figure, and an understanding of his character and career, as well as his guardianship of the Davis papers, is vital to explaining what was to become a large-scale private scandal. The only son of a Whig lawyer who died young, Harrison was a Mississippian of Virginia

[9]Jefferson Davis to Winnie Davis, March 17, 1877, in Hudson Strode, ed., *Jefferson Davis: Private Letters, 1823-1889* (New York, 1966), 451-52.

lineage. Yale-educated (Class of '59: Phi Beta Kappa; "Skull and Bones"), the twenty-two-year-old did not join the leap to arms in April 1861. Instead, he tarried on the faculty of the University of Mississippi until February 1862, when Union general Ulysses S. Grant's triumphs at Forts Henry and Donelson brought him "the call of personal duty." Planning to join the unit of family friend L. Q. C. Lamar, Harrison was directed by Lamar to report instead to Richmond to become private secretary to President Davis.[10]

While cutting a debonair figure in Richmond, Harrison also maintained a relationship with the Davises so close that he was more family member than aide. This amiable fashion plate was a regular at the capital's receptions, balls, and tableaux, where he courted his future wife, the patrician beauty Constance Cary. But his post was no safe sinecure. Though he never saw active military service, he did occasionally come under hostile fire; when he accompanied Davis to the battlefront, the president invariably sought "the ragged edge of danger." Moreover, Harrison later showed courage and resourcefulness during the 1865 flight from Richmond and his subsequent imprisonment by the federal government.[11]

It was as a consequence of the withdrawal from Richmond that Harrison had gained possession of the papers Davis desired for his research. In late March 1865—as the time for evacuating the Confederate capital drew near—Harrison had

[10]Fairfax Harrison, ed., *Aris Sonis Focisque . . . The Harrisons of Skimino* (New York, 1910), 146-50. Harrison had told Lamar in the summer of 1861 that he intended to "join the army in Virginia as soon as [his] conscience would allow [him] to do so," consistent with his duty to his sister and mother. Lamar informed him that "the country did not so need [him] as to demand . . . a breach of obligation to [his] widowed mother" (p. 150).

[11]John S. Wise, *The End of an Era* (New York, 1902), 401; Fairfax Harrison, *Aris Sonis Focisque*, 155, 150-51, 158-59; Ishbell Ross, *First Lady of the South* (New York, 1958), 158, 163, 192, 222, 24-41, 253; James Morrison Morgan, *Recollections of a Rebel Reefer* (New York, 1917), 232; Mrs. Burton Harrison, *Recollections Grave and Gay* (London, 1912), 149, 232-33. No less a judge of masculine good looks than Mary Boykin Chesnut pronounced Harrison handsome, if somewhat loud, and the aristocratic John S. Wise commented on how the young man "maintained such an immaculate wardrobe, when all the world besides was in rags." Harrison himself confessed in a letter to his mother the extravagant lengths to which he would go to appear well-dressed. C. Vann Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut's Civil War* (New Haven, 1981), 439; Wise, 401; Fairfax Harrison, 156.

ordered his office's papers boxed for shipment to safety. Soon afterward, he was sent to escort the president's wife and family on their escape southward. After his departure, one of his abandoned trunks was commandeered from his room in the executive mansion. Taken downstairs to the president's office, the trunk was stuffed with Davis's private files and also sent south.[12]

Although the flight of the Confederate executive department ended with imprisonment for Davis, Harrison, and several others, the president was in the gravest jeopardy. As one steamer took him to his cell at Fortress Monroe, another transported to Washington tons of captured government archives gathered in Richmond. Some of these papers, federal authorities hoped, would send Davis to the gallows.[13] But other extremely important papers had been saved from confiscation. The archives of the executive office, for example, were kept safe by Mrs. Henry Leovy, a Confederate officer's wife, from whom Harrison retrieved them upon his release from prison in 1866. And, soon after moving to New York City, a baffled Harrison received his abandoned trunk; inside, unaccountably sharing space with some of his old clothes, was a mass of Davis's private papers. A woman in Washington, Georgia, who had concealed the trunk since the fleeing Confederate cabinet had visited town in May 1865, had forwarded the container to its owner. Until then he did not know it had been pressed into service.[14]

If Davis had been brought to trial by the United States government, both sets of papers in Harrison's keeping, along with

[12]Burton Harrison to Jefferson Davis, May 24, 1877, in Rowland, 7: 547-49. Since Harrison had twice resigned threatening to join the army, Davis had moved him "under the Presidential roof . . . 'to keep [him] from running away.' " Fairfax Harrison, *Aris Sonis Focisque*, 151.

[13]Michael B. Ballard, *A Long Shadow: Jefferson Davis and the Final Days of the Confederacy* (Jackson, Miss., 1986), 153; Carl L. Lokke, "The Captured Confederate Archives under Francis Lieber," *The American Archivist* 11 (October 1946): 280; Dallas Irvine, "The Archive Office of the War Department: Repository of Captured Confederate Archives, 1865-1881," *Military Affairs* 10 (Spring 1946): 95-96.

[14]Burton Harrison to Jefferson Davis, May 24, 1877, in Rowland, 7: 548-50. In her account of the Confederate cabinet's brief visit to Washington, Georgia, the trunk's temporary custodian did not mention her postwar contact with Harrison. Mrs. M. E. Robertson, "President Davis's Last Official Meeting," *Publications of the Southern History Association* 5 (July 1901): 291-99.

documents hidden elsewhere, would have been used in preparing the ex-president's defense. But the trial never took place. And since Davis, released from prison in 1867, at first had neither the time nor the stomach to write his history of the Confederacy, the papers remained with Harrison.[15] Far from being a devotee of the Lost Cause, Harrison seems to have had little interest in the manuscripts and little time for the freed ex-president. Although an ardent Davis loyalist during both the war and the consequent imprisonment of his "Chief," he wished his own future untrammeled. Just after Davis was released he wrote to his fiancée: "[The] decree which admitted Davis to bail liberated me also—and from that moment I was released from all bonds—save one. . . . The past is now the past—all is now in the future." At once he set about to build an "extensive and lucrative" law practice whose demands would outweigh most others.[16]

In the summer of 1866, soon after Harrison took charge of the papers, Colonel Walter Taylor communicated with him on behalf of General Robert E. Lee. Determined to write a history of his Army of Northern Virginia, Lee wanted copies of his letters to Davis; these, he wrote, would "be of great use to me and enable me to speak more fully of movements and their results." Taylor's request met with assurances that copies would

[15]George Shea to Editor, *New York Tribune*, January 15, 1876, in *SHSP* 37 (1909): 246-47; Hudson Strode, *Jefferson Davis: Tragic Hero* (New York, 1964), 250-52; Roy Franklin Nichols, "United States vs. Jefferson Davis," *American Historical Review* 31 (January 1926): 283-84; Eron Rowland, *Varina Howell, Wife of Jefferson Davis*, 2 vols. (New York, 1931), 2: 463-64; [Varina Howell Davis], *Jefferson Davis, Ex-President of the Confederate States of America* (New York, 1890), 798-99; Jefferson Davis to Burton Harrison, March 30, 1870, Harrison Papers.

[16]James Elliott Walmsley, "Some Unpublished Letters of Burton N. Harrison," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society* 8 (1904): 81-85; Burton Harrison to Constance Cary, May 18, 1867, in Mrs. Harrison, *Recollections Grave and Gay*, 268; "Harrison, Mrs. Burton," *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, 4: 321. Harrison was always closer to Varina Davis than to her awe-inspiring husband. After the war, Davis felt remorse over the misfortune Harrison suffered because of their relationship. As Davis wrote in his memoirs, Harrison's "fidelity was rewarded by a long and rigorous imprisonment." And, while himself still imprisoned, Davis had written his wife to give the newly-released Harrison his "sincere regard, with regret that his faith to me should have brought him so much evil." Later Davis also regretted that it had not been in his power to promote Harrison's postwar fortunes. Ross, *First Lady*, 163; Jefferson Davis, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, 2 vols. (New York, 1881), 2: 704; Strode, *Private Letters*, 232; Davis to Harrison, April 16, 1872, Harrison Papers.

be forthcoming. But that December, Lee wrote Taylor that he feared Harrison could not "fulfill his promise" of supplying copies. His fear was not unwarranted, for the copies never came. By 1868, Harrison had moved several times and considered his boardinghouses unsuitable for safely storing the papers. But instead of placing them in the security of a bank vault, he sent them—as yet unsorted and uncataloged—to a warehouse. The Leovy papers were in a "goods box"; the others were still tumbled together in the trunk with Harrison's clothes.[17]

Over the next few years Davis inquired repeatedly about his papers. His first inquiry, in early 1870, brought a reassuring response from Harrison that the papers, which he "set great store by," were "carefully stowed away in a safe place." While admitting there was no list of the papers, he promised to arrange and "overhaul" them immediately if Davis so desired. He also mentioned that he thought it would be proper to make copies in case the originals were lost. Of the papers' great value Harrison was certain. They were, he asserted, second in importance only to the Confederate state papers, which former Richmond diplomat Colonel John T. Pickett was then "hawking about" in search of a buyer. Harrison condemned Pickett's actions; he feared the collection would be "broken up and the papers scattered."[18]

Davis decided it would be best not to disturb his papers until "a more convenient season." His account of the Southern Confederacy, he wrote, would have to be postponed in any case: "I am much occupied and have not felt equal to the work of writing constantly on any subject, least of all on that of which I have not become able to think calmly. State rights, constitutional government, and community independence are to me as the memory of buried love." Naïvely, he suggested that the

[17]R. E. Lee to Colonel Walter H. Taylor, May 25, December 28, 1866, in Walter Taylor, *General Lee: His Campaigns in Virginia, 1861-1865* (Norfolk, Va., 1906), 310-11. Harrison to Davis, May 24, 1877, in Rowland, 7: 550. At this time (1868) a trial for Davis was still possible. A *nolle prosequi* was not entered in the case until February 1869. Nichols, "United States vs. Jefferson Davis," 284.

[18]Harrison to Davis, March 26, 1870, Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia.

"Pickett Papers" could have little monetary value, and that Harrison should buy them for a small sum if possible. (The U.S. government bought them in 1872 for $75,000.)[19]

September 1871 brought Davis a strange letter from William Bradford Reed regarding the papers Harrison held. Reed, Davis's former counsel and a kinsman of Harrison, issued a veiled warning that Davis should soon take personal control of his papers: "I assume that your confidential archives exist somewhere, in fact I have heard from Mr. Harrison that they do. Valuable as they must be, they would need supervision as you alone can give." Reed had good reason to know that Davis needed to supervise the papers. Harrison had allowed him use of Davis's lengthy memorandum of Francis Preston Blair's abortive 1865 peace mission to Richmond. Reed was later to have it printed in a periodical without Davis's permission.[20] Despite Reed's warning, it was 1872 before Davis pointedly asked for the return of his papers. From Memphis, Tennessee, Davis instructed Harrison to forward the papers to that place in care of Colonel William M. Browne, another former presidential aide, who was to help Davis prepare the long-delayed memoirs. There was no response from Harrison.[21]

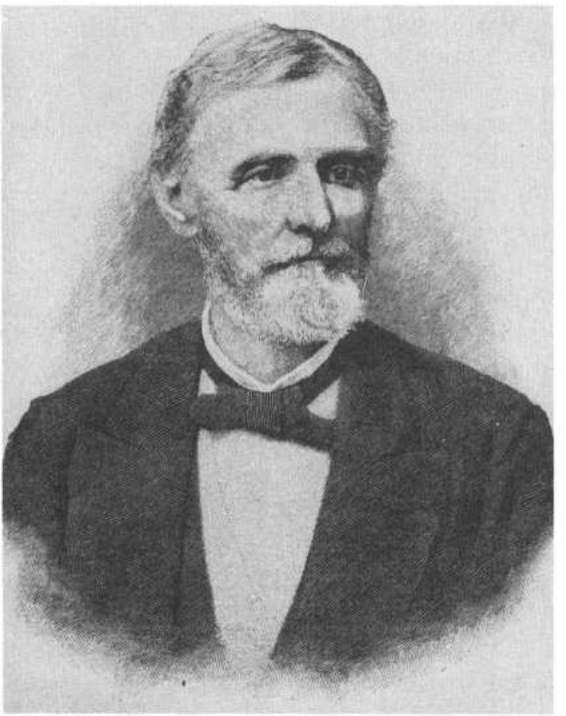
During the next four years, Davis's affairs were extremely unsettled. After a period of calm in Memphis, Davis saw the insurance company he had headed collapse in 1873. For a time the ex-president had no permanent address, and by 1875 he was immersed in a lawsuit to recover Brierfield, his Mississippi plantation. Nonetheless, Davis found time to make two more requests that Harrison send the papers. As before, there was no answer. Within a few months of the last request, however, the resignation letter was in print.[22] Having waited in vain for

[19]Davis to Harrison, March 30, 1870, Harrison Papers; James Morton Callahan, *The Diplomatic History of the Southern Confederacy* (Baltimore, 1901), 15.

[20]William B. Reed to Jefferson Davis, September 18, 1871, in Rowland, 7: 297; Fairfax Harrison, *Aris Sonis Focisque*, 198; Roy F. Nichols, "Reed, William Bradford," *DAB*, 15: 461-62; Harrison to Davis, May 24, 1877, in Rowland, 7: 551.

[21]Davis to Harrison, September 27, 1872, Harrison Papers.

[22]Strode, *Tragic Hero*, 385, 387, 405; Robert McElroy, *Jefferson Davis, The Unreal and the Real*, 2 vols. (New York, 1937), 2: 627; Davis to Harrison, November 14, 1875; Davis mentions the three requests in his letter to Harrison of May 19, 1877, Harrison Papers. Davis advised Walthall of his final request to Harrison: "I have written again



This portrait of Jefferson Davis, ca. 1880, shows the former president of the Confederacy just before the publication of his *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government* in 1881. *Etching courtesy of the Hargrett Collection.*

a response from Harrison, Davis instructed Major Walthall to call upon his former secretary personally. Since it was necessary for the major to visit New York City to confer with Davis's publishers, he could use the opportunity to collect the papers.[23]

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to Mr. Harrison about the letters and papers . . . and . . . requested him to send them to you. I hope they are answers to many letters in the *Letter Books*, or letters to which Letter Books were answers, and will thus shed much light upon the current events of the war." Davis to Walthall, November 21, 1875, Rowland, 7: 466.

[23]Davis to Harrison, May 19, 1877, Harrison Papers. On August 3, 1876, Davis had authorized Walthall to enter into an agreement with his publishers, D. Appleton & Co., to furnish Walthall with money for "expenses, and support" as he collected material and assisted in the preparation of Davis's book (Rowland, 7: 516). On his New York trip in October 1876, during which he called upon Harrison, Walthall entered into such an agreement, apparently on October 19, 1876. Thomas A. Bryson, "A Note on Jefferson Davis's Lawsuit Against Appleton Publishing Company," *Journal of Mississippi History* 32 (May 1971): 159.

Consequently, in late October 1876 Walthall arrived at Harrison's new home near exclusive Gramercy Park in New York's Middle East Side. He found that the young lawyer, then absorbed in the presidential campaign of his neighbor Samuel J. Tilden, no longer had possession of the papers. Concerned that the manuscripts might fall prey to "mice or mould or other damaging agents," and realizing that the warehouse was not really a "safe place," Harrison had loaned the papers in 1870 to an acquaintance, a fellow southerner who like Harrison was a northern-educated attorney and former Confederate officer. This gentleman, a noted collector of autographs and artifacts, owned a house which—given his valuable possessions—should have made the manuscripts more than ordinarily secure from fire and theft. In addition, the collection's new custodian was to overhaul and arrange the papers, all in all a satisfactory situation from Harrison's point of view. The next step was obviously to visit the keeper of the papers and reclaim them for their owner.[24]

Crossing the East River by ferry to Brooklyn, past the looming towers of the unfinished new bridge, Walthall and Harrison arrived—apparently unexpectedly—at Colonel Charles C. Jones's brownstone on Clinton Street in the Heights. Apprised of the reason for the call, the colonel readily produced Harrison's trunk and the Leovy papers, which were in "bundles of convenient size." Harrison then demanded to know why Jones had published Lee's resignation letter, a dispatch he recalled as having been among the papers on loan to the colonel. Expressing surprise that the manuscript had been printed without authority, Harrison inquired about the location of the other Lee letters that had been in the trunk. Jones countered that neither the letter in question nor any other Lee papers had been in the trunk; an acquaintance from Richmond had shown him the resignation letter, along with other Lee-Davis correspondence. At present, Jones added, he held several Lee manuscripts on loan from this person, whose name he did not re-

[24]Fairfax Harrison, *Aris Sonis Focisque*, 214; Mrs. Harrison, *Recollections Grave and Gay*, 300-301; Harrison to Davis, May 24, 1877, in Rowland, 7: 550, 552.

veal. A cursory examination of the trunk's contents by Harrison and Walthall disclosed the old clothes, but no papers of any significance.[25]

Walthall, while not entirely satisfied with Jones's explanation, felt an immediate admiration for the tall, impressive colonel and was not inclined to press him. Consequently, he and Harrison retired from the field with Jones's assurance that the Leovy papers and the trunk would be sent to them by express. Although Walthall soon left for Beauvoir with the papers, Harrison kept his trunk and sent no message of explanation to Davis regarding the affair. Apparently depending upon the major to intercede for him, Harrison waited for Davis's thunderbolt to fall.[26]

And fall it did, but not until May 1877. Then, in a bitter letter, Davis reminded Harrison of the three unanswered requests for the papers' return, as well as the young man's earlier assurance that the collection was secure. Walthall, Davis added, was unable to find many documents that should have been among the papers; most important, there were no letters from General Lee. "As you told me that the papers had been put in a place of absolute safety," Davis continued, "it is fair to assume that you know or can learn who had access to them after you took charge of them, and it is but reasonable that I should look to you to trace if practicable and restore to me the letters and papers that have been pillaged."[27]

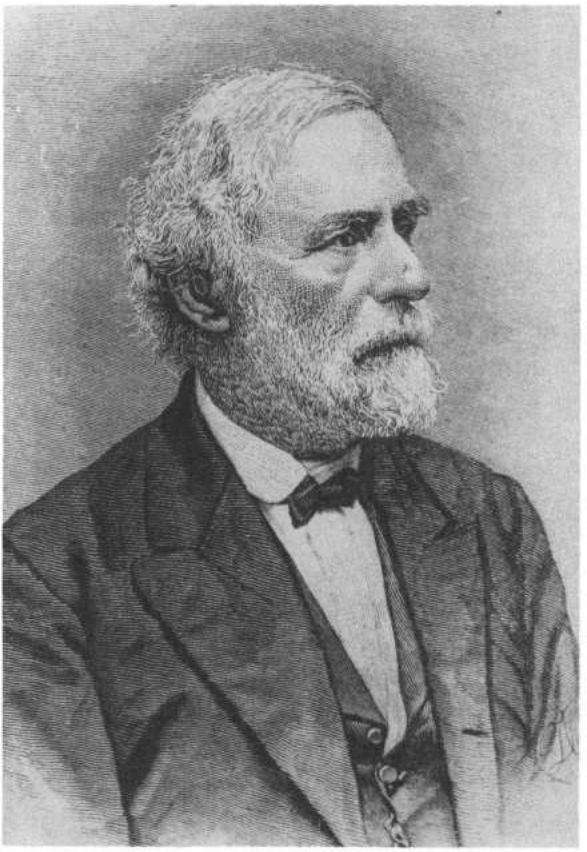
Harrison's response was rambling and overwrought (and did not address the question of why he had not answered Davis's previous letters). He described the events surrounding

[25]*Trow's New York City Directory for 1876* (New York, 1876), passim; David McCullough, *The Great Bridge* (New York, 1972), 104-5, 107-8, 224-25; Harrison to Davis, May 24, 1877, in Rowland, 7: 550, 552, 551.

[26]Walthall to Harrison, June 9, 1877, Harrison Papers; Jones to Harrison, October 25, 1876, Jones to Walthall, October 25, 1876, LB #L-2038, Duke. Along with the Leovy papers, Jones sent Major Walthall copies of his books *Historical Sketch of the Chatham Artillery* and *The Siege of Savannah in 1779*. "My best wishes attend you," he wrote, "in the accomplishment of the great work that is before you."

While Harrison and others denied that any of Davis's letters could have come into the hands of persons in Richmond, Mrs. Davis cited at least one such instance. Rowland, 7: 553; Callahan, *Diplomatic History*, 12.

[27]Davis to Harrison, May 19, 1877, Harrison Papers. This letter was appended as a postscript to a contrastingly cordial letter of the same date.



This engraving of Robert E. Lee, ca. 1869, was published as an illustration for Jones's 1876 *Scribner's* article "A Piece of Secret History." *Engraving courtesy of Hargrett Collection.*

the Richmond evacuation, his acquisition of the papers, and his loaning them to Jones, as well as the confrontation in Brooklyn. Strangely for someone in his predicament, Harrison next admitted that a more thorough search of the trunk had disclosed a few Lee manuscripts, along with a volume of Confederate laws. He was only then—over six months later—sending copies of the letters, with his wife's request that she be allowed to retain the originals as keepsakes. Harrison requested the law book as a memento for himself.[28]

[28]Harrison to Davis, May 24, 1877, in Rowland, 7: 547-53, passim.

As for Jones, Harrison advised Davis that the historian had returned to Georgia. The colonel "has the reputation of a man of great spirit and integrity," continued Harrison. "If appealed to by you, I have no doubt he will promptly render you every aid in the object now before you. Indeed . . . he expressed a readiness to do so. He will perhaps, furnish you at once with copies, at least, of all the letters from General Lee . . . ; and he will of course indicate the persons in Richmond he spoke of as owners of the originals." These individuals, Harrison asserted, "will probably give up any letters of that kind and even people who prize such things as autographs (and the autograph hunter is apt to be unreasonable), can probably be prevailed upon to furnish copies."[29]

In a cover letter to Walthall, Harrison more openly suggested Jones's guilt in the matter. He stated that the colonel was "ambitious to be President of the University of Georgia" and could consequently be brought to terms by such powerful fellow Georgians as Generals John B. Gordon, J. F. Gilmer, and A. R. Lawton—Davis allies all, and men whom Jones could not afford to offend. Unknown to Harrison, Jones had already refused to take the university position because of its inadequate salary.[30]

Davis was away from Beauvoir when Harrison's letter arrived, but Walthall acknowledged receipt. The major also informed Harrison that he had himself written Jones, who had told him that a Captain James O'Donnell of Richmond was the mysterious owner of the Lee letters. Consequently, Walthall had enlisted the aid of the Reverend J. William Jones of Richmond's Southern Historical Society, along with former Confederate officers including Generals D. H. Maury and Custis Lee. None had ever heard of O'Donnell, nor could they find any trace of him in the old Confederate capital. Admittedly baffled by this "Hibernian *nominis umbra*," Walthall asked Harrison's help in discovering whether O'Donnell was "man or myth."[31]

[29]*Ibid.*, 553.

[30]Harrison to Walthall, June 1, 1877, in Rowland, 7: 546-47; Jones to Charles J. Jenkins, July 28, 1874, LB #L-2037, Duke.

[31]Walthall to Harrison, June 9, 1877, Harrison Papers; Jones to Walthall, November 20, 1876, LB #L-2038, Duke. General Custis Lee's futile effort to find Captain O'Donnell is recorded in a letter dated April 20, 1877. Rowland, 7: 535-36.

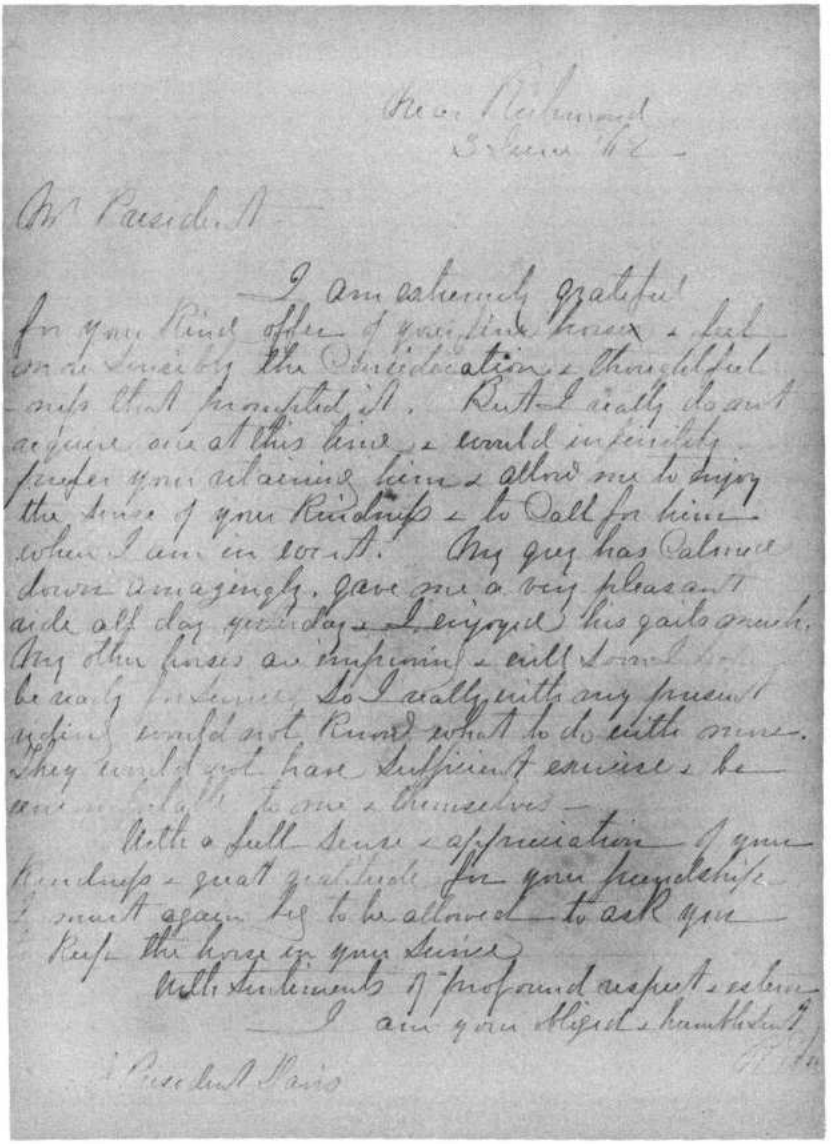
Upon his return to Beauvoir, Davis responded to Harrison's letter of explanation. While allowing Mrs. Harrison to keep the Lee manuscripts she had transcribed, he requested the return of the law book as a much-needed reference. Regarding the pillaged papers, Davis repeated that it was impossible that they had been taken from anywhere but Harrison's trunk: the missing manuscripts "must have been sent to Richmond after being removed from your trunk if they were found there at any time." This comment suggested the real possibility that the papers might have been rifled before Jones had taken custody of them. Since Harrison had never made a systematic listing of the papers and had not checked them after their stay in the warehouse, could they not have been plundered while in storage? Such manuscripts were of recognized value, and Harrison's connection with Davis was well known. Furthermore, a theft at the warehouse was not improbable: the captured Confederate archives in Washington had been robbed of several articles with guards on duty. If papers had likewise been taken from the warehouse, it was conceivable that Jones had indeed copied the resignation letter from the manuscripts of a Richmond collector who had, knowingly or not, purchased stolen goods.[32]

It is uncertain whether a personal appeal from Davis to Jones would have yielded copies of the letters, for such a request was never made. Not having the address of the colonel (who unknown to Davis had moved permanently to Augusta, Georgia), the ex-president wrote instead to former Confederate Quartermaster General A. R. Lawton in Savannah. In a letter of July 5, 1877, Davis told Lawton of Colonel Jones's involvement in the case of the missing letters. Would Lawton correspond with Jones and urge him to have the papers returned?[33]

Unknown to Davis, both Lawton and Jones had practiced law in Savannah before the war and were old friends. In fact,

[32]Davis to Harrison, July 13, 1877, and March 14, 1873, Harrison Papers; Lokke, "Confederate Records," 295.

[33]Myers, *Children of Pride*, 1591-92; Jefferson Davis to A. R. Lawton, July 5, 1877, Alexander Robert Lawton Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Jones's home was in Summerville, a resort suburb of Augusta.



Chronologically the first of the De Renne Collection's unpublished correspondence, this letter was printed as "Dispatch No. 1" in *Lee's Dispatches*. Written just after Lee assumed command of the army defending Richmond in June 1862, it declines President Davis's offer of his own horse and describes Lee's own "grey," Traveller. *Letter reproduced courtesy of the Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond.*

both were set to attend Georgia's constitutional convention the week that Davis's letter arrived.[34] Consequently, Davis was soon favored with a letter from Jones himself, which managed to be both courteous and curt:

> "Dear and honorable Sir:
> While in Atlanta, a day or two since, General Lawton showed me your letter . . . and requested me to reply directly to you. In response I beg to say that I am unable to afford you any definite information touching the matter inquired of."[35]

Other than assurances of his "highest respect" and wishes of "every success in the execution of the valuable labor" claiming Davis's attention, he said no more.

With Walthall, however, Jones proved more communicative. Less than a month after his letter to Davis, the colonel provided Walthall with a fairly detailed explanation of his dealings with the elusive O'Donnell—an account later supplemented at the major's request. Jones further informed Walthall that he had written to O'Donnell; having received no answer from Richmond, he promised to write again. Described by Jones as a "gentlemanly man apparently about forty-five years of age, tall, and with a light beard," O'Donnell had lived in Great Jones Street in Manhattan when the colonel had met him. The two had been introduced by another member of New York City's circle of Confederate emigrés, John R. Thompson, who, Jones noted, was certainly known to Walthall by reputation at least.[36]

Indeed, Thompson was widely known, especially in the South. He had been editor of *The Southern Literary Messenger* during Edgar Allan Poe's association with it, and, more recently, had served as chief writer for the *Index*, the Confederacy's propaganda organ in England. Also a noted poet,

[34]Myers, *Children of Pride*, 1568, 1591. Numerous letters in several collections attest to the friendship between Lawton and Jones, among them Lawton to Jones, May 27, 1879, Charles Colcock Jones, Jr., Collection, UGA.

[35]Jones to Davis, July 16, 1877, LB #L-2038, Duke. The letter regarding Davis's request, which Lawton forwarded to Augusta before knowing he would see Jones in Atlanta, is dated July 9, 1877 and is found in the Jones Collection, UGA.

[36]Jones to Walthall, August 9, 1877, and January 22, 1879, LB #L-2038, #L-2041, Duke.

Thompson was author of the popular "Burial of Latané" and "Lee to the Rear." Moreover, Thompson was an intimate friend of the Burton Harrisons; in fact, Mrs. Harrison, who had begun a successful writing career in 1876, considered Thompson her literary godfather.[37]

Thompson, recalled Jones, had assisted him with his mammoth project of compiling a roster of Confederate generals and statesmen, published in 1876. As a mutual acquaintance of Jones and O'Donnell, Thompson had brought them together in 1869; he wanted the colonel to examine O'Donnell's collection of Confederate papers for items useful in preparing his roster. At least three times Jones and Thompson were received by O'Donnell and allowed to search the collection. On one of these occasions, Jones had copied the resignation letter, later publishing it for its "preservation." While Thompson's involvement would seem to have substantiated Jones's story, the poet/editor was unable to verify the colonel's account. Ravaged by consumption, Thompson had died in poverty in 1873.[38]

Walthall sent a copy of Jones's letter to Harrison, since Davis intended that Harrison make good his pledge to "cheerfully assist in every way in the recovery of what is missing." But the former secretary declined to aid Walthall in that or other matters associated with the preparation of Davis's history. During the remaining period before the book's publication, Harrison's assistance seems to have been restricted to that page of the volume which was to contain his portrait as a member of Davis's

[37]James Southall Wilson, "Thompson, John Reuben," *DAB*, 18: 464; Mrs. Harrison, *Recollections Grave and Gay*, 119-20, 123. Appearing a few months after "A Piece of Secret History," Mrs. Harrison's "A Little Centennial Lady" marked the beginning of a career which included "a stream of novels, magazine stories, and historical sketches," as well as an acclaimed book of memoirs. Victoria S. Roemle, "Harrison, Constance Cary," *Notable American Women, 1607-1950* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), 2: 146-47.

[38]Jones to Walthall, August 9, 1877, and January 22, 1879, LB #L-2038, #L-2041, Duke; Gerald M. Garmon, *John Reuben Thompson* (Boston, 1979), 142, 144. Jones's roster was printed in installments in the first three volumes of *SHSP*, June and December 1876 and June 1877. The colonel's exhaustive search for information on and autographs of the military and civil officers of the Confederacy eventually filled twelve volumes, illustrated with engravings. Jones to Elliot Danforth, May 1, 1891, LB #F-2062, Duke. Definitely acquaintances, Jones (misidentified as a general) and Thompson appear together in one memoir, telling fireside ghost stories at a Brooklyn soiree; the Georgia Historical Society later published Jones's story from a manuscript in its collections. Mrs. Roger A. Pryor, *My Day: Reminiscences of a Long Life* (New York, 1909), 391; Lilla Mills Hawes, ed., *Jones Sees A Ghost!!!* (Savannah, 1981).

executive staff. Additionally, there is no evidence he ever returned Davis's book of Confederate laws; in any case, after waiting a year, the ex-president had to repeat his request for the book's return.[39]

Walthall never found a trace of the Lee letters or their supposed owner; Davis's *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, written without them, appeared in 1881. But Davis was never reconciled to the loss of these or other papers. "The letters of a private and confidential nature which were written to me by Genls. in the field have been nearly all lost," he complained to General Marcus Wright. Later Davis confided to Wright that some of his losses had been through theft. "I grieve to say," he wrote, "much of the robbery has been since the war, and by pseudo friends."[40]

After publication of his history of the Confederacy, Davis devoted his remaining years to writing other books and articles, continually defending both himself and his cause from critics north and south. As time went on, he became cherished in the South as the Confederacy's foremost living symbol and was much in demand as a speaker at memorial observances throughout the former Confederate states.[41]

Thus it was that in 1886 the elderly ex-president traveled to Georgia, where in Savannah's Johnston Square a huge throng assembled to hear him. Ironically, Davis shared speaking duties with none other than Colonel Charles C. Jones, upon whose arm the frail old man ascended to the speaker's platform. By that time Jones was Georgia's foremost historian

[39]Walthall to Harrison, August 20, 1877, Harrison Papers; Harrison to Davis, May 24, 1877, in Rowland, 7: 547; John Taylor Wood to Davis, December 26, 1880, in Rowland, 8: 540; Davis to Walthall, September 28, 1878, in Rowland, 8: 282. Walthall's letter also mentions two efforts (the first a letter of July 10, 1877) to enlist Harrison's aid in refuting General James Harrison Wilson's erroneous and insulting account of Davis's capture in Georgia in May 1865. Though Harrison would furnish nothing for publication, Captain Raphael Semmes, former Confederate attorney general George Davis, and former presidential aides William Preston Johnston and Francis R. Lubbock provided Walthall with their recollections of the episode. Walthall appended these accounts to his article, "The True Story of the Capture of Jefferson Davis," which was published in *SHSP* 5 (March 1878): 96-126.

[40]Davis to Marcus J. Wright, July 18, 1878, October 14, 1880, in Rowland, 8: 175, 503.

[41]McElroy, *Davis*, 2: 708-11; Clement Eaton, *Jefferson Davis* (New York, 1977), 265-66; Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy* (New York, 1987), 95-98.

(lauded by George Bancroft as the "Macaulay of the South") and, as a tireless defender of the Lost Cause, was among the state's most popular orators. If Davis recalled Jones's role in the business of the lost dispatches or held it against him, he showed no sign of it. Indeed, away from the crowd the two found time to share a glass of fine Madeira, as Davis looked with interest at an eighteenth-century journal Jones had edited. In years to come, several cordial letters passed between Beauvoir and Montrose, Jones's mansion in Augusta.[42]

Following Davis's death in 1889, Jones's *Funeral Oration in Honor of President Jefferson Davis*, an extravagant eulogy, appeared. Issued first in pamphlet form, the oration was later included in both of the massive memorial volumes printed in Davis's memory.[43] Only four years later Jones himself died at the age of sixty-one, leaving behind an enviable reputation as historian and speaker, as well as a vast library of exquisitely bound books, an extensive autograph collection, and a huge trove of Indian artifacts.[44]

Within a decade of Jones's passing, the other principals in the affair of the missing papers were likewise dead. Walthall

[42]Burke Davis, *The Long Surrender* (New York, 1985), 259-61; *Savannah Morning News*, May 7, 1886; Edward J. Cashin, "Charles C. Jones, Jr.," *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (hereinafter cited as *DLB*), 30: 161-62; James Calvin Bonner, "Charles Colcock Jones: The Macaulay of the South," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 27 (December 1943): 334; Charles C. Jones to Mrs. Mary De Renne [May 1886], box 26, Keith Read Collection, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah; Davis to Jones, April 13, 1887, bound into Jones's author's copy of *The Old South*, UGA; Davis to Jones, September 13, 1889, bound into Jones's author's copy of *Funeral Oration in Honor of President Jefferson Davis*, UGA. During the autumn following his Savannah speech, Davis received a large tome bound in green crushed morocco: one of only forty-nine copies of the Egmont journal, edited by Jones for Mrs. Mary De Renne, who gave it to Davis. This was the work Jones had shown Davis in Savannah. *Catalogue of the Wymberley Jones De Renne Georgia Library . . .*, 3 vols. (Wormsloe, Ga., 1931), 2: 845; Leonard L. Mackall, "The Wymberley Jones De Renne Georgia Library," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 2 (June 1918): 68-69; Davis to Mrs. De Renne, November 7, 1886, Jefferson Davis File, De Renne Georgia Library: Published Works, De Renne Family Papers, UGA (hereinafter cited as De Renne Papers).

[43]Charles C. Jones, Jr., *Funeral Oration in Honor of President Jefferson Davis* (Augusta, Ga., 1889); John W. Daniel, ed., *Life and Reminiscences of Jefferson Davis By Distinguished Men of His Time* (Baltimore, 1890), 329-48 [Jones's oration in full]; J. William Jones, ed., *The Davis Memorial Volume* (Atlanta, 1890), 615-18 [excerpts from Jones's oration]. In the manner of Shakespeare's Antony in Caesar's funeral oration, Jones figuratively summoned his listeners to advance to Davis's corpse and view the scars made by Federal shackles. Jones, *Funeral Oration*, 16.

[44]Cashin, "Jones," 162; Mackall, "De Renne Library," 71-72.

This portrait of Charles C. Jones, Jr., indicates the maturing scholar whose historical writings would soon earn him a reputation as the "Macaulay of the South." *Photograph courtesy of the Manuscript Department, Duke University Library.*

died in 1898 after a tour in the U.S. diplomatic service. Cast from Davis's circle even before the memoirs were published, the major had been charged by Davis with improperly retaining correspondence relating to his research.[45] Burton Harrison lived out his life in New York City, where he and his literary wife were fixtures of the social scene. While he continued to practice law with marked success, Harrison was little involved with politics after his friend Tilden's loss in 1876. Harrison's one venture into writing was "The Capture of Jefferson Davis," published in *Century Magazine* in 1883; its accuracy was enhanced by explanatory notes provided promptly and gener-

[45]Walthall Papers Collection Description, Mississippi Archives; Davis to Walthall, May 2, 1881, in Rowland, 8: 599-600. An authority on Davis's lawsuit against his publishers suggests other shortcomings of Walthall, and hints that "Walthall acted in a greater capacity than that of 'research assistant.' " Bryson, "Davis's Lawsuit," 153. It is sometimes asserted that the memoirs were ghostwritten by Walthall. McLeroy, *Davis*, 2: 708.

ously by Davis at Harrison's request. During a 1904 visit to Washington, D.C., Harrison died at the age of sixty-six and was buried in Virginia soil.[46]

Shortly before Harrison's death, what seemed to be another lost Lee dispatch appeared in an obscure southern periodical. Written from Camp Orange, Virginia (like the resignation letter), this missive was dated a month later and described operations following the Gettysburg campaign. The magazine's editor commented that the letter was "supposed never to have been published before." He was in error. The letter had seen print in the *Official Records* years earlier, with the text apparently based upon a copy, for the magazine's version was in fact a transcription of the original manuscript letter. Interestingly, it had been submitted by "Charles Edgeworth Jones, Esq., of Augusta," son and heir of Colonel Charles C. Jones.[47]

In 1910, Douglas Southall Freeman, then a rising young Virginia historian with *A Calendar of Confederate Papers* to his credit, was visited by the wealthy Georgia bibliophile W. J. De Renne. At Wormsloe, his estate near Savannah, De Renne had collected an amazing range of rare historical publications and numerous manuscripts, all housed in a magnificent marble library of classic design. He wanted Freeman to edit one of his manuscript collections for publication. Since Freeman revered Robert E. Lee, it is not difficult to imagine the awe with which the young scholar beheld the papers he was to edit. In two leatherbound volumes there were over two hundred letters, most in Lee's autograph, and almost three hundred of the general's telegrams. To the astonished Freeman, these tomes must have suggested twin icons.[48]

[46]Ross, *First Lady*, 380, 408; Fairfax Harrison, *Aris Sonis Focisque*, 214, 218, 209-10 n. 1, 225 n. 1, 221; "Burton N. Harrison Dead," *New York Times*, March 30, 1904. It may be inferred from a remark in Mrs. Harrison's memoirs that Harrison's postwar loyalty to Davis had been questioned. Referring to Harrison's May 1867 letter, cited previously, she wrote, "No one could read this loyal outpouring of a young man's enthusiasm for a fallen chief with any doubt that his friendship and heart's desire to serve Mr. Davis continued always . . . but the course of their lives diverging at this point, never ran in parallel lines again." *Recollections Grave and Gay*, 268-69.

[47]"Documents," *Gulf States Historical Magazine* 2 (January 1904): 292-93; *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, ser. 1, vol. 29, pt. 2: 742-43 [1890]. The original manuscript is in the *Georgia Portfolio*, vol. 2, Charles C. Jones, Jr., Papers, Duke.

[48]John L. Gignilliat, "Douglas Southall Freeman," *DLB* 17: 159; Mackall, "De Renne Library," 73-82; Douglas Southall Freeman, ed., *Lee's Dispatches* (New York, 1915),

The strong personality of Wymberly Jones De Renne is apparent in this 1910 portrait. An ardent bibliophile, De Renne prized his leather-bound Lee volumes above many of his treasures. *Photograph in private collection of Malcolm Bell III, reproduced with his permission.*

Freeman surmised that these wartime dispatches must have comprised a private collection kept by their recipient, Confederate President Jefferson Davis. Incredibly, research revealed that approximately one hundred of the letters and a like number of telegrams had never before seen print; the major

xxxv; Freeman to W. J. De Renne, February 8, 1911, Douglas S. Freeman File, De Renne Papers. De Renne had apparently been pleased by the glowing description Freeman had given of his (De Renne's) mother's collection of Confederate imprints in Richmond's Confederate Museum. Douglas Southall Freeman, *A Calendar of Confederate Papers* (Richmond, 1908), 501.

alternate source—Lee's letterbooks—had been much diminished by destruction during the war's last days.[49]

Published in 1915 as *Lee's Dispatches*, the previously unpublished manuscripts managed to retain something of their mystery. As Freeman noted in his introduction to the collection, "nothing of consequence" regarding the provenance of these lost dispatches could be discovered, except that they had been purchased by Mr. De Renne from an unidentified "well-known Southern writer." This bit of information only somewhat narrowed the field: De Renne's acquaintance among scholars was fairly wide and included several eminent southern historians, among them the esteemed Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, who was also a collector of manuscripts.[50]

Aside from the historical value of the letters themselves, it was the cryptic history of the dispatches that aroused the interest of several of the reviewers and, no doubt, of many readers. Conjectures regarding the letters' source "undoubtedly intrigue the imagination" commented one reviewer, while a recipient of one of De Renne's presentation copies wrote the bibliophile that the book had raised "a really romantic incident in collecting. . . . I hope that one day the secret will be given up."[51]

But almost a quarter century passed before a solution to the mystery was offered. In 1939 in an admirably comprehensive study, "The Fate of Confederate Archives," Dr. Dallas Irvine of the National Archives accused Colonel Charles C. Jones of having purloined the letters and later having sold them to De

[49]Freeman, *Lee's Dispatches*, xxxvi; Dallas D. Irvine, "The Fate of Confederate Archives," *American Historical Review* 44 (June 1939): 841 n. 85; Freeman to De Renne, June 2, 1911, De Renne Papers.

[50]Freeman, *Lee's Dispatches*, xxxv; De Renne Georgia Library Papers, passim; Kirk Wood, "Ulrich B. Phillips," *DLB*, 17: 355. The heyday of Phillips's collecting was the 1920s. Merton L. Dillon, *Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, Historian of the Old South* (Baton Rouge, 1985), 59, 123-25. Phillips expressed thanks for access to the De Renne Collection in the preface to his 1913 Robert Toombs biography. Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *The Life of Robert Toombs* (New York, 1913), ix. See also William Harris Bragg, " 'Our Joint Labor': W. J. De Renne, Douglas Southall Freeman, and *Lee's Dispatches*, 1910-1915," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (forthcoming, January 1989).

[51]Douglas Gordon, "Lee's Unpublished Dispatches," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, August 5, 1915; Worthington C. Ford to De Renne, June 15, 1915, in "Personal Comments on Lee Letters" [scrapbook], De Renne Papers. The collection also contains a scrapbook packed with clippings of the newspaper and magazine reviews of *Lee's Dispatches*.

Renne. Citing a wealth of sources, including the Library of Congress's Burton Harrison papers and Davis's published correspondence, Dr. Irvine briefly traced the dispatches from their loss after the fall of Richmond to their publication by De Renne. Irvine's case against Jones, however, though very persuasive, was circumstantial; moreover, it was based largely on the testimony of Burton Harrison, hardly a disinterested party.[52]

Yet Dr. Freeman, by that time the nation's foremost expert on Confederate history, had no qualms about giving Irvine's theory wider circulation; he included it prominently in his 1939 study *The South to Posterity*. It was not that Irvine's research had supported Freeman's earlier theory regarding the nature of the dispatches (though it had). Instead, Freeman himself was in a position to know the truth of Irvine's assertion: he had apparently known since first handling the bound letters in 1910 that they had belonged to Colonel Jones, presumably because Jones's armorial bookplate still graced the book's pastedown. In fact, in correspondence with De Renne, Freeman referred to the book of Lee letters as the "Jones volume."[53]

Meticulous historian that he was, Freeman had wished to mention Jones's previous ownership of the papers, along with De Renne's theory as to how the colonel had come by them, in the introduction to *Lee's Dispatches*. But De Renne would not consent. "I do not know how Col. Jones secured the letters," he wrote Freeman, "and I see no reason to mention that I bought them from him. You could say if you wish that I bought them among others in a collection of MSS of Southern military men and statesmen."[54] Apparently De Renne considered the

[52]Irvine, "Fate of Archives," 823-26; Harrison's letter had been printed in Rowland's collection of Davis's papers in 1923.

[53]Douglas Southall Freeman, *The South to Posterity: An Introduction to the Writing of Confederate History* (New York, 1939), 96-101. (Irvine never consulted with Freeman regarding this matter and did not know what Freeman knew. Dallas Irvine to writer, September 1, 1985.) Freeman to De Renne, December 5, 1910, and February 6, 1911, De Renne Papers. De Renne followed common practice in retaining the bookplates of former owners in the volumes he acquired. Several of the books he bought from Jones are described as containing the colonel's distinctive bookplate. *De Renne Library Catalogue*, 2: 11, 211, 217, 223, 324, 445, 524, 526, 559, 599.

[54]Freeman to De Renne, May 1, 1914, De Renne to Freeman (corrected draft), May 15, 1914, De Renne Papers. The fact that *The South to Posterity* ignores Jones's contribu-

story of the Lee letters' source best left unexplored, at least in print. And Freeman honored his request, then and later, although he came nearer to naming Jones than De Renne had originally suggested.

De Renne's curiosity, however, had been aroused. Soon after publication of the dispatches, he wrote to Jones's historian son, inquiring how the colonel had acquired the papers. "I would be glad to give you the desired information," Edgeworth Jones responded, "as to the source from which my Father procured the Lee Letters, were it in my power to do so. But, unfortunately, he never mentioned the matter to me." For De Renne, who died in 1916, the secret of the lost dispatches would remain a mystery.[55]

No mystery, however, shrouds the relationship between De Renne and Colonel Jones. De Renne's father, an avid antiquarian and autograph collector, and his mother, a collector of Confederate imprints, had been friends and patrons of the

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tions to Confederate history perhaps suggests Freeman's opinion of the colonel and his collecting methods. The historian's assessment of Burton Harrison, on the other hand, was highly favorable. Harrison's son Fairfax, a railway executive and writer, was Freeman's friend and "a brilliant inheritor of great traditions." Douglas Southall Freeman, *R. E. Lee: A Biography*, 4 vols. (New York, 1934-35), 4: 531.

Interestingly, two fellow Richmonders who contributed to Freeman's early Confederate studies had known Colonel Jones well in earlier years. Representing the Lee family in the publication of the dispatches was Dr. W. Gordon McCabe, a renowned Virginia educator and former officer in Lee's army. Unknowingly, McCabe had been in close proximity to the Lee papers about forty years before they were shown to him by Freeman. During a trip to New York City to visit John R. Thompson in September 1870, McCabe wrote home that he had recently "spent the evening in Brooklyn, and made a very pleasant acquaintance in the person of Col. Charles Jones. . . . He is a very accomplished gentleman and promises to give me some books he has written." Freeman was also well acquainted with a lady who had been a friend of both Colonel Jones and General Lee. Kitty Stiles, born in Savannah in 1832—the year following Jones's birth there—was custodian of the Confederate Museum's Georgia Room, where Freeman did much research. Armistead Churchill Gordon, *Memories and Memorials of William Gordon McCabe*, 2 vols. (Richmond, 1925), 1: 188, 2: 406-9; Freeman to De Renne, August 5, 1915, De Renne Papers; Gordon, *McCabe*, 1: 306-7; Myers, *Children of Pride*, 796, 1691; Freeman, *Calendar*, 13.

[55]Charles Edgeworth Jones to De Renne, August 28, 1915, "Personal Comments on Lee Letters," De Renne Papers. Jones's letter is the first pasted in the book, which was apparently maintained by De Renne himself. Nearly all of the other communications in the book are letters of appreciation for presentation copies of *Lee's Dispatches*, including an earlier letter from Edgeworth Jones. De Renne's letter of inquiry is not found in C. E. Jones's papers at the University of Georgia and Duke.

colonel.[56] It seems likely that the younger De Renne had been acquainted with Jones since the 1870s, when he was a law student in New York City. After an adventurous life had led him from Georgia to Germany to a central Texas ranch—and then on to the French Atlantic coast—De Renne, both parents dead, had returned to his ancestral home at Wormsloe. There he had begun collecting rare books and manuscripts, like his father, specializing in sources relating to Georgia history. It was inevitable that he seek out Colonel Jones, a great authority on De Renne's favorite subject, as well as a valued family friend.[57]

The time was the early 1890s; the old historian was ailing and in financial straits. Consequently, at some time between 1891 and 1893, Jones evidently sold De Renne the Lee dispatches, which had enriched his library for over two decades. The price De Renne paid is unknown, although he insured the two volumes for $10,000 when Freeman shipped them from Richmond to Wormsloe in 1911.[58]

How did Jones get the papers he sold to De Renne? The inescapable conclusion is that he acquired the dispatches in

[56]E. Merton Coulter, *Wormsloe: Two Centuries of a Georgia Family* (Athens, 1955), 224-30, 237-40; Mackall, "De Renne Library," 68-73. George Wymberley Jones De Renne, father of W. J. De Renne, had been born George Frederick Tilghman Jones but had changed his name legally in 1866. Despite having identical last names, these two families of coastal Georgia Joneses were not related. Coulter, *Wormsloe*, 213, 215-16, 224.

[57]Coulter, *Wormsloe*, 241-43, 247-49. Close upon his return to Georgia from New York, Jones sent the elder De Renne a manuscript entitled *The Dead Towns of Georgia*. De Renne was impressed enough to pay for publication of the work, which Jones dedicated to him in handsome fashion. After his patron's death, Jones wrote a graceful eulogy of De Renne for the Georgia Historical Society. G. W. J. De Renne to Jones, December 25, 1876—bound into Jones's author's copy of *The Dead Towns of Georgia*, UGA; Charles C. Jones, Jr., *The Dead Towns of Georgia* (Savannah, 1878); Coulter, *Wormsloe*, 237.

[58]Terribly wasted by Bright's disease and financially drained by the lengthy terminal illnesses of his second wife and his mother-in-law, Jones was compelled to part with several of his treasures. Although $10,000 may seem a small price for the dispatches, it should be noted that Jones had valued his immense collection of Indian artifacts at the same price, and that he had sold to J. Pierpont Morgan for $5,000 his "first set" of autographs of the signers of the Declaration of Independence; this set included Button Gwinnett's will, entirely in his hand—now considered priceless. Neil S. Penn, "Charles Colcock Jones, Jr., Georgia Archaeologist, Collector, and Historian" (M.A. thesis, Duke University, 1958), 72-74; "Death's Shining Mark," *Augusta Chronicle*, July 20, 1893; De Renne to Freeman (telegram), December 12 [1911], De Renne Papers; Penn, "Jones," 83, 89, 90; Lyman C. Draper, *An Essay on the Autographic Collections of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence and of the Constitution* (New York, 1889), 73; Dr. Joseph E. Fields, "The Known Signatures of Button Gwinnett," *The New Colophon* 3 (1950): 138.

much the same way Harrison described. In any case, the telltale resignation letter, though excluded from *Lee's Dispatches* because previously published, was among those De Renne bought. Available evidence suggests that Harrison, despite his unseemly behavior in several instances, was more of a dupe than an accomplice in the affair. But certainty in such a murky business is elusive.[59]

Captain James O'Donnell was apparently an ingenious fabrication. He appears in the city directories of neither New York City nor Richmond for the period in question, and, more persuasively, none of Jones's letterbooks contain copies of any of the letters the colonel told Walthall he had written O'Donnell. One wonders, in fact, whether Jones—in giving the apocryphal Irishman lodgings on Great Jones Street—was indulging in an ironic private joke.[60]

In contrast to O'Donnell, the very real and somewhat notorious Colonel John T. Pickett *was* an acquaintance of Jones during the early 1870s. Shortly after many southerners were roundly damning Pickett for his sale of the Confederate state papers, Jones was carrying on an amiable correspondence with him and receiving him in his home. Moreover, Jones was involved in Pickett's other great scheme of the period, the sale of replicas of the Great Seal of the Confederacy, ostensibly for the good of the suffering South.[61]

[59]The resignation letter as published in the *Official Records* (ser. 1, vol. 51, pt. 2: 752-53 [1897]) was evidently copied from "A Piece of Secret History"; it follows Jones's paragraphing, not Lee's as found in the original manuscript letter. For more details on the original, now at Tulane University, see note 65 below and the paragraph it supports.

[60]*Trow's New York City Directory*, 1867-77; extant Richmond city directories (various publishers), 1861-77; Jones's letterbooks, #L-2037-#L-2039, Duke. In age, height, appearance, and deportment, as well as "Hibernian" heritage, O'Donnell, as described by Jones, closely resembled Harrison's fellow aide in Richmond, Davis's protégé William Montague Browne—who was also a friend of Colonel Jones and an enemy of John T. Pickett. E. Merton Coulter, *William Montague Browne: Versatile Anglo-Irish American* (Athens, 1967), 29, 241, 270-72. Great Jones Street is parallel to and one block directly north of Bond Street, the location of D. Appleton & Co., publishers of both Jones's *Antiquities of the Southern Indians* and Davis's *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*.

[61]John T. Pickett to Editor, July 26, 1872, *New York Herald*, July 28, 1872; John Hollister, "A Relic of the Lost Cause," *Civil War Times Illustrated* 21 (March 1982): 34; Pickett to Jones, May 25, June 20, 1873, Jones Papers, Duke; Jones to Pickett, November 13 and 22, 1871, LB #L-2035, Duke. Pickett's letter to Jones of June 20, 1873, was also printed in Pickett's anonymous pamphlet, *Sigillologia* (Washington, D.C.,

Wormsloe House, De Renne's residence on the Isle of Hope near Savannah. A columned library building nearby housed an extensive collection of rare books and historical manuscripts. *Photograph courtesy of Hargrett Collection.*

Jones's relationship with such a man at such a time does him little credit, but it may offer a clue to Jones's rationale (if rationale there was) for disregarding Davis's right to the dispatches. While Harrison's opinion was that Davis had "legal title to all letters and other papers addressed to [him], which were ever in [his] possession, and to which [he] had never given anybody else a title," his fellow lawyer Pickett thought otherwise. Defending his sale of the Confederate state papers, Pickett suggested in part that the Confederate government, not its officers, had legal title to official correspondence and other papers and that the government's title had been voided by the destruction of the Confederacy. This interpretation produced decided benefits for Pickett and may have appealed to Jones.[62]

Such pettifoggery aside, there were at least three probable contributing factors to Colonel Jones's actions in keeping the papers entrusted to him. One is simply stated: the fierce,

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1873), 21-22. In the letter to Jones (whose involvement as a noted Confederate historian Pickett apparently thought would give the enterprise legitimacy), Pickett stated he would "use the proceeds of the sale, less bare cost of the medals, cases, & c., in the relief of as many as possible of the needy and afflicted of the South." However, "neither the number sold nor the amount raised . . . is known." Hollister, "Relic," 35. See also Burton J. Hendrick, *Statesmen of the Lost Cause* (New York, 1939), 138.

[62]Harrison to Davis, May 24, 1877, in Rowland, 7: 552; John T. Pickett to Editor, July 26, 1872, *New York Herald*, July 28, 1872.

amoral acquisitiveness of the obsessive collector. The other influences, more complex, apparently stemmed from the identity of the dispatches' author and the treatment his papers had received. The colonel's feelings toward General Lee approached idolatry. Shortly before the general's death, Jones had published at his own expense and dedicated to Lee a slender volume on the last days of the general's patriot father. When Lee suddenly died, the colonel had only recently been given custody of the dispatches; the negligence with which Harrison had handled them (and the question of their ultimate fate if Davis soon followed Lee) may have spurred Jones to "rescue" the papers. Writing about Confederate manuscripts only a week before General Lee's death, Jones had decried "the carelessness of some of the custodians of these treasures." There were, he added, "important records in private hands . . . which may yet be garnered up. These planks—still floating where the great ship foundered—should be collected before they too are engulfed in the dark sea of oblivion." Whatever his motives, Colonel Jones kept the letters and telegrams of General Lee and had them beautifully bound into latterday reliquaries. Thus, he committed an act of hero worship that his idol would have thoroughly deplored.[63]

[63]Jones, "Piece of Secret History," 519-20, 522; Charles C. Jones, Jr., *Reminiscences of the Last Days, Death, and Burial of General Henry Lee* (Albany, N.Y., 1870); Jones to General A. R. Wright, October 5, 1870, in *Banner of the South and Planters' Journal*, October 29, 1870. General Lee died October 12, 1870. According to Harrison, Jones had been given the dispatches in the summer of 1870. Rowland, 7: 550.

It is debatable whether Jones's conduct in this affair was an index of his true character, a monstrous aberration, or something in between. In the colonel's favor it must be said that most sources portray him as a generous, public-spirited man, liberal with his time and talents, and responsible for numerous benefactions. At the time of his death, he was "universally respected and greatly lamented, and was buried with signal honors."

The ambiguities of his character aside, Jones's actions in the case of the dispatches raise further questions. For example, the De Renne Georgia Library's other major manuscript collection included papers of Revolutionary War general Nathanael Greene, to whose letters Colonel Jones had been given access by the Greene family. W. J. De Renne told Freeman that the Lee letters had been purchased from Jones along with manuscripts of "Southern military men and statesmen." These are facts. Are they related? Penn, "Jones," 44-45, 56, 86, 125-26; Myers, *Children of Pride*, 1434; *De Renne Library Catalogue*, 1; W. J. De Renne to D. S. Freeman [September 21, 1914], De Renne Papers. See also J. Franklin Jameson, "The Papers of Major-Gen. Nathanael Greene," *Publications of the Rhode Island Historical Society* 3 (1895): 159-67; Richard K. Showman, ed., *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene* (Chapel Hill, 1976), 1: xxxii-xxxiii.

While W. J. De Renne had maintained the integrity of Jones's Lee volumes, dispersal was to be the eventual fate of most of the collection. Along with the rest of the Wormsloe library, the Lee dispatches were part of the legacy of De Renne's heir, and by 1940 the bulk of the library's materials had been sold to the University of Georgia. The Lee volumes, however, were not included in the purchase. The telegram book survives intact, having been purchased in 1938 by Duke University. Although somewhat worn (and slightly damaged by the removal of a former owner's bookplate) the volume bears an extremely close resemblance to other leatherbound books from Colonel Jones's library, particularly his bound manuscript of *The Siege of Savannah in 1864*.[64]

The letter volume was broken up and sold piecemeal. In 1935, collectors George and Katherine Davis bought several letters relating to the Gettysburg campaign: the resignation letter plus nine others that had first been published in *Lee's Dispatches*. All show evidence of having once been part of a bound collection. These manuscripts were later donated to Tulane University library, location of an immense treasury of Jefferson Davis material, including the Leovy papers and Davis's wartime letterbooks.[65] Although some of the letters remain in other institutions and in private hands, the bulk of them—152 letters—finally returned to Richmond. Since 1949 they have reposed in "four specially designed dark red cases" in the Virginia State

[64]Irvine, "Fate of Archives," 825-26; Coulter, *Wormsloe*, 288 n. 26. Collection Description: Lee, Robert Edward, Official Telegrams, 1862-65, Duke; Henry Putney Beers, *Guide to the Archives of the Confederate States of America* (Washington, D.C., 1968), 67; Charles C. Jones, Jr., *The Siege of Savannah in 1864* (bound manuscript), UGA. While Duke's collection description states that the book belonged to Jones—as does Beers's guide—Duke's records contain no documentation linking Jones to the book. As mentioned, the volume no longer has a bookplate and contains no other evidence to suggest Jones's former ownership. Duke's records state only that the volume was accessioned on May 19, 1938, from W. W. De Renne (W. J. De Renne's heir). Ellen Gartrell, Duke Library Manuscript Department, to writer, October 3, 1985; Dr. Linda McCurdy, Duke researcher, to writer, October 20, 1985.

[65]Descriptive Inventory, George and Katherine Davis Collection, Rare Books and Manuscripts Department, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, La. (hereinafter cited as Tulane); Wilbur E. Meneray, Head, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Tulane, to writer, January 23, 1986; Irvine, "Fate of Archives," 826. Tulane now holds most of the manuscripts formerly in Confederate Memorial Hall in New Orleans.

Library. They were the gift of the financier Bernard Baruch, whose father was a veteran of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia.[66]

The loss to history from the prolonged inaccessibility of Lee's dispatches is difficult to calculate, although it is hard to imagine that the papers would have substantially altered *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government.* In one restricted sense it seems fitting that the letters lay fallow for so long, since they were to be given to Douglas Southall Freeman to edit. The publication of *Lee's Dispatches*—helping as it did to establish Freeman as an authority on Lee—was ultimately responsible

[66]Personal Papers, Robert E. Lee—Jefferson Davis Correspondence, 1862-1865, Archives Branch, Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond, Va. (location hereinafter cited as VSLA); Assistant State Archivist Jane M. Pairo, VSLA, to writer, October 2, 1985; Randolph Church, State Librarian, to Bernard M. Baruch, October 19, 1949; Baruch to Church, June 21, 1948, Office of the State Librarian, Archives Branch, VSLA. "To me," Baruch wrote, "the memories of the great southern heroes like Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson are almost living figures because of what I heard my father and others repeat to me in story and song." (Nine items relating to Baruch's presentation of the Lee letters to the Virginia State Library—mostly correspondence, 1948-1949—may be found in the Bernard M. Baruch Papers, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University.) In 1970 the Virginia State Library added to its collection through purchase another of the manuscripts that had been published in *Lee's Dispatches.* Personal Papers, R. E. Lee to Jefferson Davis, February 9, 1864, Archives Branch, VSLA.

Since the 1915 publication of De Renne's collection of dispatches, several other letters and telegrams of General Lee have surfaced and been published, but the little information that exists on them shows no connection to Colonel Jones; at many institutions, record keeping on provenance was very casual well into the twentieth century. Douglas Southall Freeman, ed., *Lee's Dispatches, New Edition, With Additional Dispatches and Foreword by Grady McWhiney* (New York, 1957), 361-75 (eleven newly published dispatches); *Civil War History* 3 (December 1957): 368, 376 (two additional dispatches). Two brief, unpublished dispatches (actually more in the nature of endorsements in Lee's hand and with his signature) are found pasted in two of Colonel Jones's books, *Letter of General Robert E. Lee . . .* and *Fort Moultrie Centennial,* both in Special Collections, UGA.

With these rare books is another—the first volume of the colonel's personal, illustrated copy of his *The Siege of Savannah in 1864*— containing additional mounted manuscript letters of pertinence. Several are obviously from the same private executive file which yielded the Lee dispatches; some bear the endorsements and initials of Burton Harrison. Among them are the original of Lee to Davis, August 23, 1862 (following p. 4), and letters to Davis from Generals Edmund Kirby Smith and Samuel Cooper [following pp. 6 and 10, respectively). Perhaps most suggestive, however, is the original letter from Secretary of War James Seddon to Davis, September 3, 1864 (following p. 16), which enclosed and commented upon Lee's of September 2. The original of this Lee letter was among the De Renne manuscripts which went back to Richmond through the Baruch gift.

for his invitation to produce *R. E. Lee*, arguably the finest military biography ever written.[67]

As for Colonel Charles C. Jones, in the end even he was given his wish concerning the dispatches. "I need not assure you how sincerely I deplore the loss of the letters of Genl Lee," Jones had written Major Walthall in 1879, "and my hope is that they will yet come to light."[68]

[67]Gignilliat, "Freeman," 159. As a Davis biographer has noted, Davis's book is "disappointing chiefly because it deals so extensively with controversies which have largely lost their interest, and throws so little light upon . . . things not matters of military or political controversy." Davis's decision to allow his military papers to be copied for the *Official Records*, however, would have put the Lee dispatches at the command of historians years earlier and made that series more complete. McElroy, *Davis* 2, 708, 700.

[68]Jones to Walthall, January 22, 1879, LB #L-2041, Duke.